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## Vision Statement for the Talbot County Comprehensive Plan

***This Vision, and the vision statements that introduce each chapter, reflect the intended focus of Talbot County land use decision-making.***

*The primary goal of Talbot County's Comprehensive Plan is to promote a high quality of life, to preserve the rural character of our County and to protect the health, safety and well-being of its citizens, in a resilient community.*

*Recognizing that the overall environment is an economic asset of the County, protection of our agricultural lands and waterways, and their harvests, is a high priority. Our rivers, creeks, 600 miles of shoreline and fragile ecosystems are valued and protected with zeal and vigilance. The high quality of the County's infrastructure (including schools, roads, sewer and water) is maintained as the County's needs change and grow. The livability and economic vitality of our towns, along with our historical treasures and cultural amenities, are highly valued.*

*Talbot County affords those who live here an unusually high quality of life. Our comprehensive planning, our land use decisions, and our growth management strategies are all completely oriented to sustaining and enhancing this remarkable place "where land and water intertwine." To handle the development pressure in Talbot County we blend state-of-the-art planning tools, strong coordination with and support of our municipalities, and effective legislation to ensure that the quality of life associated with our rural character is maintained. We cooperate fully with other counties in the midshore area in dealing with common concerns that cross county lines.*

*Measurably positive results are required, and Talbot County's progress toward achieving the vision is monitored. A monitoring program compares baseline data and the goals and objectives of the plan against actual and proposed land use changes.*

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## Talbot County, 2015

Talbot County is a predominantly rural county located in the west-central portion of Maryland's Eastern Shore. The County's land and waterways are intertwined in a unique mosaic of tidal waters, streams, farmlands and forests. The historic settlement patterns of this rural landscape have created a scattered patchwork of farms, estates, subdivisions, villages and towns. The natural and built environments of Talbot County blend together to form a pleasant rural character where residents enjoy a generally high quality of life. The land area of the County is approximately 171,000 acres. The underlying geology is typical of coastal plains and the topography is flat to gently rolling. Approximately 95,000 acres are farmland, over 40,000 acres are forested land, and 3,650 acres have been developed.

On land, Talbot County is surrounded by Queen Anne's County to the north, Caroline County to the east and Dorchester County to the south. The County has approximately 600 miles of shoreline and is almost entirely surrounded by the waters of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. The waters that border the County are the Chesapeake Bay to the west, the Choptank River to the south and east, and the Tuckahoe River to the northeast.

On its western edge, the County is defined by numerous peninsulas, or necks. Major tributary and tidal waterway systems which border these necks include the Wye, Miles, Tred Avon and the Choptank Rivers, as well as Harris Creek and Broad Creek.

The County is divided into five election districts: Easton, St. Michaels, Trappe, Chapel and Bay Hundred. There are five incorporated towns within Talbot County:

- Centrally located along U.S. Route 50, the Town of Easton is the County seat and the major residential, commercial, and employment center of the County.

- St. Michaels is located along Route 33 on the shores of the Miles River.
- Oxford is located at the end of Route 333 along the Tred Avon River.
- The Town of Trappe is located in the south-central portion of the County along U.S. Route 50.
- The Town of Queen Anne straddles the Talbot County and Queen Anne's County border in the northeast.

Other clusters of settlement are the County's villages, with histories ranging from 100 years to over 300 years. Over time, waterfront and crossroads settlements have evolved into 22 recognized villages of various characters and sizes. These unincorporated communities include: Wye Mills, Cordova, Unionville, Royal Oak, Bruceville, Claiborne, and Tilghman.

Over the years Talbot County has grown from an isolated rural area with a population of 20,342 in 1900, to a growing and diverse community of 33,812 in 2000.

In the early 1900s Talbot County saw a loss of population, as families moved to more urban areas. The opening of the first Chesapeake Bay Bridge in the early 1950s began to reverse the population trend. This engineering feat marked the onset of substantial change for Talbot and many of the other Eastern Shore Counties, as the area became less isolated.

Greater accessibility led to some changes in development patterns over time, the waterfront subdivisions of the 20th century represent the greatest departure from prior settlements, expressing a changing relationship with the Bay and rivers, from commerce to recreation.

The second half of the 20th century also saw a change in County's economy, as it shifted from agriculture and seafood production to a more diversified base, particularly in the areas of construction, real estate, light manufacturing, trade, tourism and service industries.

Today, the County is still known for its open rural landscape, woodlands, rivers, streams and wetlands and abundance of wildlife. Agriculture and tourism account for a significant portion of the County's business economy.

Through coordinated land use policies, the County has successfully encouraged residential and commercial growth in the incorporated towns or villages. Easton, Trappe and St. Michaels are expected to grow more noticeably in the future, as planned sewer and utility expansions are completed.

Talbot County is at an important decision point. The population is projected to continue to grow at an annual rate of 1 percent. Many of the new residents will be retirees and empty nesters. Already, 23 percent of the County population is 65 years of age and above, and the median age is ten years older than the State average.

The County has also captured the attention of national retailers and travel related businesses. An older, wealthier population represents attractive market opportunities for restaurants, home improvements, automobile sales and other consumer services. The County is

experiencing increasing pressure for both residential and commercial development, with some attendant problems.

As US Route 50 becomes an increasingly used route through the County, increased traffic frustrates permanent residents. Rural roadways have become congested and cross county travel becomes nearly impossible at times.

Finally, citizen concerns about rural character, environmental protection, growth and future development patterns loom large.

The Comprehensive Plan attempts to address these and other complex issues and concerns, striving to balance quality of life and retaining rural character with the obligation to accommodate and guide future growth.

This Comprehensive Plan seeks to meet the challenges of protecting and preserving the fragile environmental resources of the County's tidal waters, streams, shorelines, forests and open space; continuing to support and encourage the active and economically vital agricultural and maritime industries; and providing guidelines for residential and commercial development at a scale and location that benefits all County residents.



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## Definitions

**Designated Growth Areas** are those areas identified in this plan and the County Zoning Ordinance as anticipated for major subdivision and development within the planning period. These are between incorporated towns and the County's Countryside Preservation (CP) zoning designation.

**Infill, Redevelopment and New Development** in Talbot County consists of minor development projects within existing developed areas.

As defined by the Maryland Department of Planning, infill in a rural village is characterized by new development on vacant parcels typical in size and shape to developed parcels in the community.

Redevelopment means building or rebuilding on parcels that have been previously developed. Typical examples will be vacant lots in rural villages, replacement of deficient buildings and adaptive reuse of obsolete structures.

New development includes subdivision, revisions and site plans on or creating parcels previously not developed.

**Master Plans** include a comprehensive study to evaluate the compatibility and suitability of existing and proposed land uses, infrastructure, facilities and services associated with new development and redevelopment, and assist County planning efforts. Master Plans, or small area plans, are required to evaluate traffic, emergency response and other infrastructure impacts of development on village character. The plans also provide a general understanding among residents on the nature and scale of proposed development.

**Population Centers** are areas settled at a substantially greater concentration than the surrounding land, consisting of a mix of residential and non-residential uses and community services. Incorporated towns are all population centers, as are those rural villages with the greatest populations, widest diversity of land uses, and the presence of public facilities.

**Quality of Life** is a condition of one's existence that can be affected by the land use decisions based on this Comprehensive Plan. For the purpose of this document, quality of life includes:

- abundant fields and forests, wildlife, clean water in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries;
- clean air, sufficient potable water in our aquifers;
- a low level of crime;
- the relative absence of traffic congestion and excessive noise;
- a diversity of economic and employment opportunities for individuals and businesses;
- good educational, social and community service systems;
- access to an adequate supply of affordable and workforce housing opportunities for residents of all ages and incomes;
- access to diverse cultural, recreational, and entertainment activities;
- convenient access to goods and services; and
- an ethic of personal involvement.

## Definitions

**Rural Character** is a predominance of farm fields and woodlands; the visible presence of wildlife; an abundance of thriving rivers, streams and wetlands; large, open spaces separating functional towns; rural villages reflecting County history; low speed roadways which are uncongested; access to farms and other private properties; a minimum of light pollution in the night skies; the absence of strip malls or retail outlets, large and prominent names or logos on building exteriors, and large commercial or residential development.

**Village Planning Areas** are Master Planned areas within Village Centers and Village Hamlets with suitable land available for infill, redevelopment and new development that shall mirror and complement the historic fabric of the respective village. The County or a developer may initiate the Master Planning process. County-initiated Master Plans will be commissioned and paid for by the County. Developer- initiated plans shall be subject to the third party review as described in the policies defined in the *Talbot County Code*.

**Vision Statement** is a statement that communicates a compelling vision of the future, is critical to implementing strategy, and that answers the question ‘What will success look like in the effective implementation of the Talbot County Comprehensive Plan?’

